

Unofficial transcript of the February 27, 2019 exchange between Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA), Representative Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), and Chairwoman Nita Lowey (D-NY) with United States Agency for International Development Administrator Mark Green during the House Committee on Appropriation's Oversight of U.S. Agency for International Development ("USAID") Programs and Policies hearing:

Representative Lee:

What are we doing in the West Indies, in the Caribbean? We discussed this a little bit. But I know there's been very little involvement in the West Indies, in the mainly black Caribbean countries. And I do know that China is of course there. And I'm wondering why we haven't engaged much in the West Indies.

Administrator Green:

With respect to the Caribbean and the West Indies in particular, as we discussed yesterday, I appreciate and quite frankly welcome your passion on this. These nations are our neighborhood, and I think that we should engage them more and as much as we can. We often engage only during moments of humanitarian crisis, when there are storms and other natural disasters, and I'm proud of the fact that we do. It would be nice to engage with them outside of storms and natural disasters. Those relationships are important. And again, I think that if we can bolster the economic vitality of our own neighborhood, the Americas, the Western Hemisphere, I think every American benefits. I think it's good for us as well as being good for them. So, you have my commitment to sit down and work with you on that. I share your passion. I think it's great.

Rep. Fortenberry spoke immediately after Rep. Lee, saying that he would address Haiti when he was called on a second time. Rep. Lee said that she probably would have to leave but would associate herself with his remarks on Haiti.

Representative Fortenberry:

As I know you're aware, Haiti is one of the larger recipients of United States aid, and understandably so. The conditions there, again structural poverty, being in our neighborhood, it's just such a deep scandal for so many of us. The country's dislocations, the current political upheaval and on and on make your work there both very important and very difficult. But one of the underlying issues obviously, well it's not obvious, this is a problem, is the border area between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. The consequences of economic dislocation because of the, let's say, underground movement of goods there that defy both market logic and disrupt the economy of Haiti are one of the key areas on I think which we need to focus. We put in the bill last year some considerations in this regard. Could you address that?

Administrator Green:

I traveled to Haiti in December. It wasn't really until that trip that I took that I began to appreciate just how much the dysfunctional border between Haiti and Dominican Republic impacts the economic prospects in Haiti. It is hard for me to see Haiti becoming at all self-reliant as long as you're having the problems that we are: smuggling of goods and ineffective revenue collection in that DR-Haiti border.

Representative Fortenberry:

Could I stop you there? Madam Chair, would you be willing, perhaps with Miss Lee, to go deeper into this issue? Because all of the good work that the Administrator and we are trying to do in Haiti is impacted or undermined potentially by this singular problem. And it's a severe dislocation but it's not well known.

Chairwoman Lowey:

But I think you remember that we had a briefing, was it a year ago? Or two years ago? I don't remember. But two of the best people at USAID has ever had that were assigned to Haiti. They were extraordinary. Now I went on my honeymoon to Haiti a long time ago. I've also been to the Dominican Republic. I won't go into details about that, but I would like to say that was probably one of the best briefings I ever had. And I think what you're saying is important because I was so proud of our representatives. I wish I could say that the results equal the talent and expertise of our representatives. We can go into this further, but I'd be most eager to work with you. I think my good friend Mr. Rogers was there as well. But I'd like to follow up with you. All I'm saying, it seems to me, we have this discussion, we put some of the best people there, and unfortunately the progress doesn't measure the talent. And I would love to have further discussion.

Representative Fortenberry:

The point of raising it and using so much time is, again, if you could help us help you with the right kind of language embedded in our bill that addresses this. Because again, we did so as a first step last year. That bill is just being implemented. It would be helpful to us. I don't pretend to have a fullness of an answer here. I just know this is a problem and we have a huge investment in Haiti, but the preconditions for that investment to be made whole rely on this successful outcome here. So, can you help us?

Administrator Green:

I don't disagree with you. Again, this last trip laid I think really that bare for me. I met some young entrepreneurs working hard at it. You saw some economic growth. But they were being undercut by smuggled goods, and they can't rise. It's impossible to have a full vibrant economy with a dysfunctional

border like that. You have my commitment. We're starting to put together a working group. Haiti is a country that has tremendous bipartisan support. We all want to see success, so I would very much like to take it on with all of you.